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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act in Britain changed the statutory responsibilities for post-school education of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. This resulted in the so-called "Schedule 2/non-Schedule 2" divide. Research examined the impact of these changes on learners and responses of 35 further education (FE) colleges and local education authority (LEA) adult education service providers in England and Wales in relation to these learners. Findings indicated significant benefits for some learners rising from the impact of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) funding methodology and the improved quality of Schedule 2 provision, but this was balanced by the trend toward diminishing LEA resources and a number of learners for whom programs were no longer offered. The impact of the split in funding for education between FEFCs and LEAs was detrimental to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, since coherent educational programs often required both forms of provision. Most adult education services reported a greater proportion of Schedule 2 work and an overall decrease of nonvocational, leisure-, and recreation-focused provision. The FEFC's funding methodologies were acknowledged as very positive in promoting better support systems for students. A clear majority of adult and community education providers of LEA-funded non-Schedule 2 provision reported a priority shift away from work with people with severe learning difficulties. Recommendations were made for FEFC, LEAs, and all providers. Appended is Further and Higher Education Act 1992: Schedule 2. (YLB)

ED 398 415

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Assessing the impact:

Provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities

Sally Faraday

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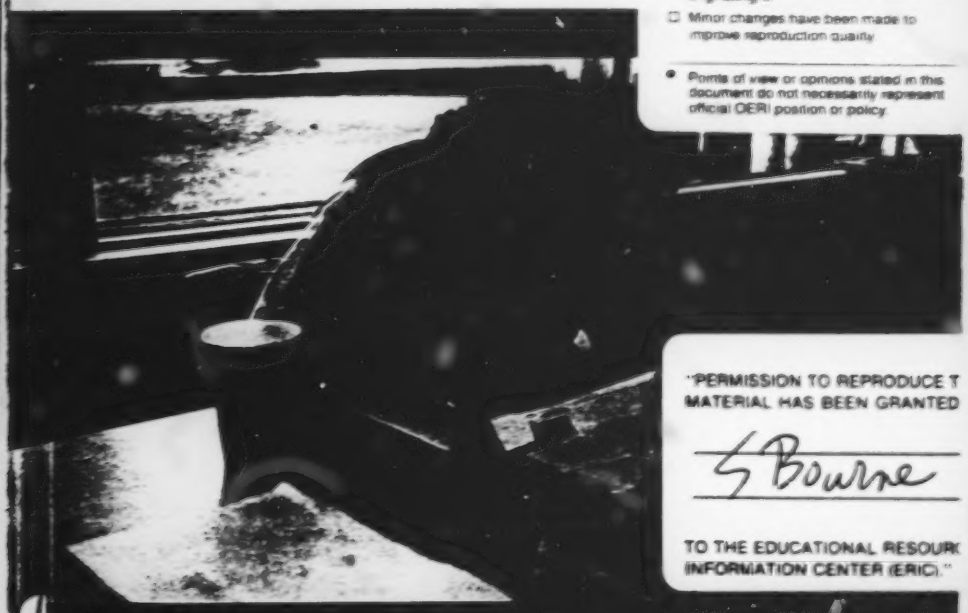

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Provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities

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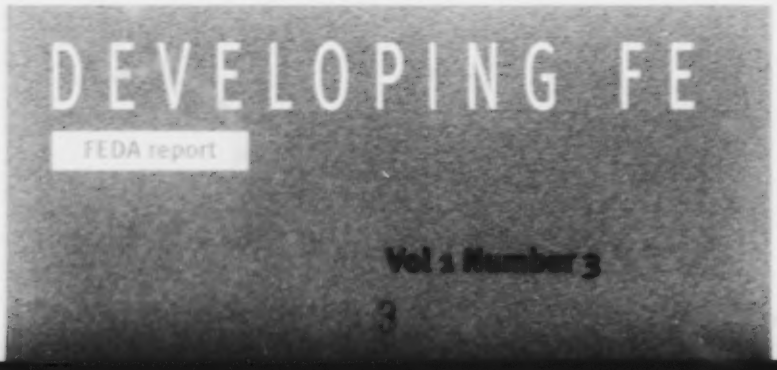

Developing FE (FEDA Reports)

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Chapter 1

Executive summary

This publication examines the impact of the changes in funding arising from the 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act's provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. It reports on research which involved staff from 35 education providers across England and Wales in 1994-5.

The main findings indicate that provision varies considerably in both type and extent. Whether or not adults with particular learning requirements have access to education depends on the mission, perceptions and interpretation of providers in the locality.

The impact of the changes on learners is mixed. There have been significant benefits for learners arising from improved guidance, support, progression routes and access to accreditation. However, learners with more complex, profound or multiple disabilities, people experiencing mental ill health, older learners and learners requiring high levels of support have lost access to provision or are most likely to do so.

The additional support units available within the FEFC(E)'s funding methodology have been warmly welcomed and have positively promoted support for learners whose requirements fall within the bands. The split in funding has caused problems because both Schedule

2 and non-Schedule 2 aspects of provision are required for coherent learning programmes and there are differences in interpretation of what constitutes Schedule 2.

This report contains recommendations derived from the research which are summarised and grouped under the themes of planning and funding; curriculum; support systems; and the impact on learners.

Planning and funding recommendations

All providers:

- carry out an inter-agency local needs analysis
- identify the curriculum and support requirements to meet needs identified
- access a wide range of funding sources
- develop sound management information systems
- ensure that current information is readily accessible for monitoring and planning
- ensure that strategic and operational plans promote a broad and balanced curriculum
- monitor the balance of provision on offer
- ensure that all possible funding sources are being utilised
- provide support to help staff to bid for funding from a variety of sources
- consult specialist support service providers, to ensure that claims for additional support needs units match the requirements of the learners

FEFC:

- produce clearer guidance notes on how to claim funding

- review existing lower and upper band limits
- reconsider the present restriction on achievement funding to outcomes which contribute to NTETs
- retain units for additional support
- consider paying units to the value of the actual cost of support
- review the guidance on FEFC Fee Remission Policy to ensure that all learners with learning difficulties and disabilities qualify

LEAs:

- make explicit definitions of 'adequacy' and 'sufficiency'
- set targets and monitor them

Curriculum recommendations

All agencies:

- be clear about the key aim of developing and maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum which encompasses the learning needs of all learners
- define their roles and identify their particular contribution to meeting the needs
- require strategic and operational plans to develop and maintain an appropriate curriculum and contribute to multi-agency planning

LEAs:

- work closely with local colleges, and other providers, to ensure that progression routes are available

- ensure that all staff have access to development opportunities to enable them to meet the needs of learners

Colleges:

- provide a wide range of access and progression points for learners, to reflect their diverse and changing needs
- develop curriculum opportunities at both Foundation and pre-Foundation level
- review discrete provision, consider its role, and ensure planned progression opportunities
- develop and maintain a wide range of strategies for delivering individual support
- explore the use of volunteer schemes or co-student support schemes
- ensure that all learners have individual learning plans with clearly specified targets
- offer externally recognised accreditation which matches learners' needs and evidence of achievement

Support systems recommendations

All agencies:

- ensure that learners have access to assessment and support systems
- collaborate to ensure the smooth transfer of relevant information

FEFC:

- allow organisations to claim the costs of all initial diagnostic assessments, regardless of subsequent enrolment
- allow organisations to claim the costs of specialist aids and equipment

Colleges:

- ensure that staff at strategic planning and operational levels are pro-active in liaising with other agencies
- set up clear procedures for early identification of particular requirements
- develop whole college approaches
- identify and plan progression routes, with support available at all stages

Impact on learners recommendations

All agencies:

- monitor the impact of contracting resources on groups of learners
- undertake community profiling to establish the nature/extent of unmet needs
- record evidence to inform strategic planning
- monitor patterns of attendance to highlight changes for particular groups
- monitor the allocation of additional support to ensure that all learners' requirements are met

FEFC:

- monitor patterns of unmet need on a regional basis

Chapter 2
Background

Introduction

The implementation of the 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act has changed the statutory responsibilities for post-school education, resulting in the so called 'Schedule 2/non-Schedule 2' divide. Research was undertaken to examine the impact of these changes on learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and to establish the responses of further education (FE) colleges and adult education (AE) service providers in relation to these learners.

This publication is derived from research which reports:

- the impact of changes in funding on providers of education for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities
- the effect on the curriculum and support offered in FE colleges and adult community education
- the implications for learners, their access to provision and the support offered to them

Key issues are identified and examples of interesting practice offered. Recommendations are provided for both strategic managers and those directly involved in the delivery of programmes in FE and adult community education.

This paper may also be of interest to the English Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) Committee on Disabilities and Learning Difficulties chaired by Professor Tomlinson, local education authorities (LEAs), purchasers and providers from social services departments (SSDs) and health authorities (HAs) and voluntary organisations.

The context

Legislative background

Since 1992 duties to provide education, previously the responsibility of LEAs, have been shared between the FEFCs for England and Wales, and LEAs.

LEAs have the statutory duty to secure the provision of 'adequate facilities for further education' and in doing so, should 'have regard for the requirements of persons over compulsory school age who have learning difficulties'.

Within the 1992 FHE Act, the term learning difficulties is defined as follows:

'a person has a "learning difficulty" if —

(a) he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age,
or
(b) he has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of the facilities of a kind generally provided by institutions within the further education sector for persons of his age'

The FEFCs have responsibility to ensure sufficient full time further education for the 16-18 age group; adequate facilities for part time provision for those over 16 and full-time provision for learners aged over 19, where the nature of the provision accords with Schedule 2 of the FHE Act 1992. In doing so the FEFCs must also consider the requirements of persons with 'learning difficulties'.

The term 'adequacy' implies that provision may be deemed to be adequate even where there is evidence of unmet need in the local population, whereas sufficiency is a somewhat stronger duty.

Schedule 2 is presented at the end of this report as Appendix 1. The list of types of courses eligible for funding by the FEFCs includes some which may be particularly relevant to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

LEA-funded non-Schedule 2 provision refers to all other educational activity which includes non-vocational provision.

This publication examines how Schedule 2 has been interpreted in practice and how the statutory responsibilities have been shared between FEFCs and LEAs.

Responsibility for educational provision is thus divided between two agencies and the position is further complicated for people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Under the National Health Service and Community Care Act (1990), HAs and SSDs are responsible for assessing individuals' needs and drawing up Individual Care Plans. They are then responsible for 'purchasing' services to meet needs. Thus responsibilities and powers of commissioning and providing are divided between a range of different agencies.

An Individual Care Plan may include education for an individual with learning difficulties. In such cases, the SSD may purchase education from FE colleges or adult community education providers — a third source of funding for educational provision. HAs and SSDs also have some responsibility support services such as transport which may be crucial in enabling access to educational provision.

The research

Thirty-five FE colleges and LEA AE providers were interviewed about the impact of the changes in legislation. The sample included a range of establishments from each of the regions in England and in Wales.

Examining the impact of the changes on learners and making valid comparisons in provision proved difficult for various reasons:

- there is no shared terminology to describe the learning needs of individuals or shared understanding of what common terms mean. For example, the term severe learning difficulties is widely used, yet in some contexts it refers to individuals whose needs include learning to communicate in simple words or phrases or learning to cross the road safely. In other cases it has been used to refer to students undertaking national qualifications who need substantial support with literacy
- accurate statistical data from which comparisons may be made is not available. Providers make returns to external bodies but these rarely include details about learners with learning difficulties and disabilities in sufficient detail.

  Although numbers of students attending discrete or specially designed courses may be maintained, they are not always centrally collated and fail to give the full picture as many learners are undertaking programmes within the general offer
- the views of practitioners and senior managers from within the same establishment were often significantly different

Given these factors, it was realistic to gather perceptions, then seek evidence to support the views expressed.

The findings of the research are presented and discussed in sections under the headings of:

- adult education provision in the FE context
- funding
- curriculum
- support systems
- the impact on learners

Chapter 3

Adult education provision in the FE context

Some FE colleges see their remit as offering broad educational opportunities for all — no matter what degree of disability or learning difficulty an individual may have. Others clearly target learners above a certain ability level and identify clear boundaries of responsibility for provision between FE colleges, LEA adult education and social services departments. Amongst project participants there was a consensus that, in principle, the full range of educational opportunities should be available to all learners wishing to participate. In practice, most of the establishments in the sample operated some cut off point with learners above a certain ability or degree of dependency being targeted.

Two establishments defined boundaries between the responsibilities of education and day care provision; Schedule 2 guidelines were perceived as reinforcing these boundaries.

One FE college has no provision for people with profound or multiple disabilities and does not perceive the college to be the appropriate provider for this group.

Another FE college has experienced pressure from the social services department to provide a range of facilities and sensory environments for people with profound or multiple disabilities. The college response has been that this is not their role, that social services have both the expertise and the facilities to cater for the learning needs of this group of individuals more appropriately.

A clear split in terms of approach came to light during the research. Adult education providers traditionally offer opportunities to a wider group and within the sample all mentioned people with profound and multiple disabilities as an important group for whom they made provision. Often, demand was not being met but from a philosophical standpoint all establishments wanted to provide for this group and, unlike some FE colleges, felt that it was a clear part of their mission, role and responsibility.

Interpretations of schedule 2

Deciding on the Schedule 2/non-Schedule 2 split

Initial decisions about which programmes were to be included or not in Schedule 2 were often taken by senior or finance managers without reference to curriculum delivery staff, who sometimes reported that their views were not heeded. This led to inconsistent decisions about which programmes were submitted for FEFC funding. Other institutions, through a dialogue with the staff at FEFC regional offices, were reassured that their broader interpretation of Schedule 2 was justified. This interpretation was subsequently confirmed by inspection.

One college has a substantial programme for highly dependent people with severe learning difficulties who were resettling from long stay hospitals. Consultation with staff at the FEFC regional office confirmed that since the primary aim of the learning programme was to develop independent living and self-advocacy skills the programme fell within Schedule 2.

In this case the FEFC supported the college in adopting a broader interpretation of what may be included within Schedule 2, than the college would otherwise have made. Comparisons of the advice received from regional offices, however, suggest that there may be some ambiguity and inconsistency of interpretation.

The positive impact of Schedule 2

Some FE colleges welcomed Schedule 2 because it clarified their role in relation to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. It confirmed the purpose of their educational provision and distinguished between activities more appropriately described as rehabilitation or therapy. The expressed fears of one college of becoming a 'day centre' were alleviated by the emphasis on accreditation and progression to vocational provision. There was a general view that this had increased the status of this work.

The perceived 'risk' of Schedule 2

Practitioners in many institutions expressed a reluctance to develop new areas of the curriculum because they feared that they would not meet the requirements of Schedule 2. Concern was expressed that in these circumstances funding could suddenly be withdrawn. This view was particularly prevalent with staff from adult education institutions who were generally less confident about their interpretations of the requirements for Schedule 2 and their ability to meet those requirements, than their counterparts in FE colleges.

Learners with profound and multiple disabilities and learning difficulties unlikely to progress to independent living and other courses within Schedule 2, were identified by providers as a particular group negatively affected by the requirements of Schedule 2.

Reduction of non-Schedule 2 programmes

A definite trend towards reducing the range and number of non-Schedule 2 programmes, was noted. Classes with a strong leisure, recreational or therapeutic focus were described as particularly vulnerable and had been cut back, as had classes aimed at older people. This change was attributed to the overall reduction in LEA funding.

Some providers expressed the view that the academic and vocational focus of Schedule 2 implies that these forms of learning are valued more highly than the development of personal and social skills which are more relevant to independent living.

Chapter 4
Planning and funding

Funding sources

The main sources of funding for adult and further education providers are the FEFCs, LEAs, social services departments, the European Social Fund and Training and Enterprise Councils. There were great variations amongst providers in the sources of funding, for the same or similar activities. In a few FE colleges funding came exclusively from the FEFCs and some AE providers received funding almost exclusively from the LEA. The most common approach was seeking funding from more than one source, although a few providers exploited the full range of sources successfully. FEFC funding was the major source of funding overall.

At one FE college, all courses now fall within Schedule 2 with the exception of provision for a group of 15 students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Provision for these learners is funded by the Social Services Department and takes place on an outreach basis within the day centre.

A Welsh FE college receives funding primarily from the FEFC(W) and the All Wales Strategy funds other support costs.

Responses to FEFC funding for Schedule 2

For adult education providers, FEFC funding provided a smaller, in some cases insignificant, proportion of over all funding . This contrasted with FE colleges for whom the FEFCs are the main source of funding.

Two opposing approaches to seeking FEFC funding for Schedule 2 activities were evident from adult education providers. In the few cases where LEA funding levels were maintained and appeared relatively secure, providers felt that there was no incentive to seek FEFC funding, even if the provision was clearly within the scope of Schedule 2. FEFC funding was viewed only as a fallback in case LEA funding was cut. Decisions appear to have been made on the basis of what seemed to be the most secure and reliable source of funding or the easiest to access, rather than on the definitions of responsibility in the 1992 Education Act.

The administrative requirements of the FEFCs, the audit evidence required and the eventual need for external accreditation were seen as major drawbacks. LEA respondents reported concerns about record keeping and the demands of external accreditation requirements where so many staff and students are part time. The staff development involved was perceived to be impractical.

> *In one LEA a single lecturer co-ordinates provision for approximately 300 part-time students. All the staff involved in delivering this provision are part time. In the past, there had been a senior lecturer co-ordinator, two full -time lecturers and several associate lecturers responsible for roughly the same number of learners.*

In other cases where LEAs had experienced major cuts in funding, FEFC funding was seen as a means of preserving as much of the provision as possible. Some FE colleges had chosen to replace LEA funding with FEFC funding which was viewed as the safer option, and accordingly restricted the curriculum range to meet the perceived requirements of Schedule 2. Since programmes of basic literacy and numeracy are

included in Schedule 2, this has resulted in an inappropriate emphasis on these skills in some cases.

The impact of reduced LEA funding

Most of the adult education providers reported notable reductions in LEA funding. Within adult education the frequently reported narrowing of the curriculum was largely attributed to cuts in LEA funding. Both FE college and AE staff considered that the maintenance or development of a broad and balanced curriculum required both non-Schedule 2 and Schedule 2 activities attracting both FEFC and LEA funding. In a number of cases, where LEA funding had ceased to be available for the general or mainstream programmes, classes had continued to run on a cost-recovery basis. This meant that learners had to share the full cost between them, resulting in a steep rise in fees. There were no concessionary fees in these classes so learners with learning difficulties, if unable to afford the full fees, had effectively been excluded.

In responding to reduced resources there was a clear trend towards catering for the most able learners with minimal support requirements who could be accommodated in larger groups. In this way, limited resources reach the largest number of learners. Consequently, the more 'expensive' provision, such as programmes for people with high support needs, was being reduced.

Adequacy and LEA funding

Most LEAs appear to have inadequate data and means of collecting information to inform decisions about whether or not their provision meets the legal requirement of adequacy. For detailed information about this issue see *Adequate Provision for Adult Learners —A framework* (FEU, Aug. 1994).Although providers had difficulty in defining what would constitute adequacy for their own organisation, none felt that provision was entirely adequate and some identified whole areas of unmet need.

Health authority and social services department funding

In most colleges, FEFC funding was supplemented by support from health authority or social services departments. This was either through the direct funding of courses for specific groups of learners or through the purchasing of places within general college provision. Courses are delivered on college premises, within centres or other community locations. In some cases, provision is made in the learners' homes; this is particularly common with older learners.

Adult education provision has also sought and become more reliant on health authority or social services department funding in response to shrinking LEA budgets. However, this funding is generally for specific courses — often for a small group of learners who come from a particular centre or residential establishment.

> *The health authority provides resources to one college to deliver courses for learners who live at two particular residential hostels. These courses take place at college but are open only to residents from the two houses concerned. There are currently no opportunities for integration within the rest of the adult programme and no progression routes from these courses to the whole college curriculum.*

Where external agencies provide funding for educational provision, it is essential that joint planning between the agencies ensures that opportunities are opened up as widely as possible and learners are not unnecessarily segregated.

> *In other cases, colleges attract funding from social services departments for taster programmes for learners from day centres who may then move on to access the full range of college provision.*

Social services departments play a very significant role in some areas.

> *The All Wales Strategy provides finance through community support teams.*

In one college, the social services department funds a co-ordinator for non-Schedule 2 work.

Joint Finance monies from health authorities were used to fund particular liaison or co-ordinator posts or specific projects. This funding is of fixed duration and considerable concerns were expressed about the lack of future funding and the resulting loss of provision and posts.

In one LEA where the adult education service is devolved and delivered through the colleges, Joint Finance currently accounts for the funding of over half the discrete provision.

Although the role of funding from complementary authorities was considered important, there was considerable concern that it was under increasing pressure and in some cases would be cut.

Response to community care resettlement

Links with long-stay hospitals have led to funding partnerships.

In one area, the health authority has close links with the LEA — a long-stay hospital for people with learning difficulties is based very close to one site and has been involved in the joint running of the Open University 'Patterns for Living' course.

There was a reported increase in referrals from adults with severe learning difficulties who were resettling from the long-stay hospitals closing in response to the Care in the Community initiative. Yet providers had fewer appropriate courses for these people. It was commonly thought that this provision would not fit within Schedule 2.

A number of establishments noted an increase in demand, either directly or indirectly, from users of the mental health services. This increase stems from improved links with other agencies and again from the impact of Care in the Community initiatives. Pockets of provision exist for these learners but lack of staff expertise and appropriate training

creates barriers. Their requirements do not fit easily with the funding methodology. They need to learn in small groups or as individuals in a very supportive environment; to drop in and out as required; to recover lost skills in a way that is not clearly progressive; and to achieve learning outcomes which cannot be easily expressed in academic or vocational terms. These needs were described as problematic.

FEFC funding methodology: the achievement element and primary learning aims

Some providers thought that the emphasis on funding of achievement, particularly where this was expressed as an accreditation outcome, had resulted in a loss of provision. There was a common concern that some students with disabilities within mainstream programmes were being enrolled on courses at an inappropriate, lower level, to ensure that they achieved the outcome. The fact that a higher rate of units for achievement is given for outcomes which contribute to National Training and Education Targets (NTETs) is thought to have led to a devaluation of other outcomes at lower levels.

Additional support needs

Provision within the funding methodology to claim units for additional support for learners with disabilities and difficulties, has led directly to such learners gaining access to the curriculum in many institutions. This was viewed positively by all respondents, although it was evident that in a number of cases where other organisations franchise with FE colleges, they failed to claim the additional support units to which the learners were entitled. This seemed to be due to a lack of information and understanding of the processes for claiming.

Additional support needs — bands

There was a consensus that the ceiling of Band 5 for units for additional support was too low and fell short of the costs for learners who required higher levels of support or more expensive forms of support. This was felt to be a disincentive to the recruitment of these learners and there was evidence that this provision is diminishing in a number of establishments.

Similar concern was expressed about the threshold for the lowest bands which is set at too high a level and excluded many learners who require minimal additional support but would be unsuccessful without it. Establishments are expected to provide a level of support for all learners from within their own resources, but it is those learners who require a small amount of support over and above what is normally provided, for whom the threshold of the lowest band is too high.

Tuition fees — remission policy

The FEFC tuition fee remission policy is intended to offer remission to people on low incomes for whom the payment of fees would present a barrier to access. Providers expressed concern that the guidance offered suggests that only those in receipt of 'disability'-related benefits will qualify. This will not include some students who were formerly eligible, including some with learning difficulties or mental ill health.

Recommendations

FEFC:

- produce clearer guidance notes on how to claim funding, with illustrative examples, to ensure access to funding for additional support needs
- review the existing lower and upper band limits, enabling 'exceptional payments' beyond any upper set limit
- reconsider the present restriction on achievement funding to outcomes which contribute to NTETs as this devalues the achievements of many learners
- retain units for additional support needs
- consider paying units to the value of the actual cost of support rather than at the notional level of the bands, which may not match the colleges' average level of funding per unit
- review the guidance on FEFC Fee Remission Policy to ensure that all learners with learning difficulties and disabilities qualify

LEAs:

- make explicit definitions of 'adequacy' and 'sufficiency', set targets and monitor to ensure that provision meets the defined criteria
- provide staff support and assistance to ensure that appropriate personnel are aware of and competent to bid for funding from a variety of sources

All providers:

- carry out an inter-agency local needs analysis, identify the curriculum and support requirements to meet the needs identified
- access a wide range of funding sources to help maintain and develop a broad and balanced curriculum
- develop good management information systems to ensure that current information is readily accessible for monitoring and planning purposes
- ensure that strategic and operational plans promote a broad and balanced curriculum, accessible to adults with learning difficulties and disabilities
- monitor the balance of provision on offer to examine the impact of diminishing resources on particular groups of learners
- ensure that all possible funding sources are being utilised
- ensure that staff receive guidance and training in the preparation of bids, so that they are able to access all available sources of funding
- consult specialist support service providers, whether internal or external, to ensure that claims for additional support needs units match the requirements of the learners

Chapter 5
Curriculum

The impact on curriculum of changes in resources

While some freestanding adult education providers have continued to offer a wide range of both Schedule 2 and non-Schedule 2 provision, most establishments have faced cutbacks in resources. This has led to a reduction in both the range and the quantity of provision. Most adult education services reported a greater proportion of Schedule 2 work and an overall decrease of non-vocational, leisure- and recreation-focused provision. Yet demand is reported to have increased. Only one LEA reported expansion, where steady LEA funding as well as Joint Finance funding and monies from a variety of other sources have ensured the continued development of provision.

Many providers especially from the adult education sector, deplored the reduced opportunities for progression resulting from the reduction in non-vocational provision. Some LEAs reported extensive cuts in resource levels.

One LEA has seen a major reduction in all provision. This affects people with learning difficulties in particular as a traditional progression route has been from discrete to mainstream provision. Not

only have the discrete programmes been reduced, but the opportunities within mainstream have all but disappeared.

'Discrete' and 'mainstream' provision

Although these terms were frequently used by respondents, there was confusion amongst providers as to what 'discrete' actually meant. Most establishments defined the term as a course designed for and open to a specific group of students with disabilities or learning difficulties. One establishment within the sample used the term discrete to describe courses delivered from within mainstream programme areas. In many cases discrete provision was perceived as separate and described as coming under the auspices of a distinct 'Learning Support' or 'Special Needs' section.

In FE colleges, a general trend was reported away from discrete or specially designed courses for identified groups of learners, towards greater access to mainstream programmes. This was paralleled in adult education where a variety of opportunities aiming to support integrated learning, were reported. These schemes were primarily in the non-Schedule 2 area.

An adult education service has a Linking scheme 'Learning Together' which has been in existence since 1989. The aim of the scheme is to enable people with learning difficulties to join mainstream adult education classes with the help of a volunteer co-student. The volunteer helps with transport and also acts 'as a friend .... giving any help where necessary. This may be during the class or at break time, helping the student to fit in and enjoy the group, while learning a new skill'. Funding, from social services and adult education departments, is available for 80 pairs of students.

Within FE, one college runs a 'Partners in Learning' programme, where students with learning difficulties are paired with mainstream students. The course is unusual in that Open College Network accreditation is available at different levels for all students involved.

The reasons given for offering discrete programmes were that they provided a pre-Foundation level not otherwise available, a focus on independent living skills and a programme of tasters. In most cases these programmes aimed to facilitate progression by enabling students to move to mainstream provision. Discrete programmes were described as a launch pad offering access to the whole curriculum.

Pre-foundation level

In seeking to achieve a coherent curriculum offer, many FE establishments have identified the need for both NVQ 1 or GNVQ foundation and pre-foundation or entry-level provision. Programmes at NVQ level 2 or GNVQ Intermediate level are commonly available but most establishments identified gaps at earlier levels and recognised the need to provide them either through 'foundation studies' or by ensuring that all programme areas include the full range of levels.

One college has extended entry routes to every programme of study in order to offer more starting points for learners.

The provision of a range of levels to meet the full range of requirements is crucial in ensuring access to the curriculum for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities; yet few establishments currently offer this.

Flexibility

The flexibility of the curriculum design and delivery was seen as an important feature in offering access. In several establishments, provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities had been restructured and organised into modular programmes.

The discrete programme of courses for adults at one college has been modularised into clusters, most of which are FEFC funded.

The increased flexibility of the modular approach enabled more learners to follow negotiated programmes of study based on individual action plans, rather than a 'course' with a set timetable. This approach was reported as a direct response to Schedule 2 Clause (j) (see Appendix 1) which offers the opportunity to develop learning programmes in which individual targets and primary learning goals may be set which lead towards other Schedule 2 provision.

> *At a community college students build up a package of modules from within the FE and adult provisions to provide either full- or part -time learning programmes. This flexibility has enabled learners to undertake an individually devised and negotiated programme based directly on an assessment of their learning requirements.*

> *In another FE college with a modular curriculum, students with learning difficulties and disabilities may access all aspects of college provision. This means that within the supported provision, over 400 students and trainees are on individually negotiated programmes, progressing towards their own learning goals at different rates.*

An increasing range of strategies is being developed for the delivery of support for learning. Learning support workshops were thought particularly helpful in individualising learning and allowing more support in mainstream settings. This in turn had led to a greater awareness amongst staff delivering vocational programmes of the entitlements and requirements of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Accreditation

The definition of Schedule 2 and the requirements of the funding methodology have increased the focus on accreditation. Colleges and LEA providers have reviewed their offer and increased access to

accreditation for many learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. This has enhanced the status of both the students and the staff working with them. The rigour demanded to meet the requirements of external awarding bodies improved the quality of provision. Staff development needs have been identified for those previously teaching on unaccredited programmes who are unfamiliar with the processes of assessment and record keeping required for external awards.

Several providers saw the increased focus on accreditation as positive for many, but a potential barrier for some. For students who have been under challenged in the past and for whom progression to higher levels is realistic, the opportunity to achieve nationally recognised accreditation is important — both in terms of their status as learners and in improving their future prospects.

Providers were seeking appropriate forms of accreditation for their learners. In terms of vocational qualifications, a full GNVQ is reported not to be achievable by most people with learning difficulties, as the core skills are at too high a level and the unit tests present problems. NVQs in some occupational areas are not yet available at Level 1. The need for recognised pre Level 1 accreditation was expressed, as well as an approach for recognising smaller units of achievement than whole qualifications. A wide range of accreditation options was being investigated by FE colleges in particular. These included: the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vocational Access Certificate, City and Guilds Word Power and Number Power, and increasingly Open College Network (OCN) accreditation, which was viewed as the most appropriate and flexible option. (Accreditation is the focus of other research and development work).

An LEA-wide submission for OCN accreditation, offering an extensive range of units, had been developed by one adult education service. This had the advantage of enabling part-time staff, who were unable to devote the time to developing individual submissions, the opportunity to select prepared modules for delivery.

On the other hand, some staff expressed fears that those with more severe learning difficulties may be pushed towards accredited programmes which attract funding but which do not meet their learning needs. Concern was also expressed that students who are unable ultimately to achieve qualifications will be excluded. Some LEA-funded providers had made a positive decision not to bid for FEFC funding as they judged that this would mean seeking accreditation which they did not consider appropriate and which would distort the nature of the learning programme required by these individuals.

Progression

The requirements of the FEFCs' funding methodologies have led establishments to review their provision. Within FE, the clearer definition of learning aims for individual learners and the mapping of progression routes have been warmly welcomed by the majority of establishments and have led to curriculum development. Where some discrete courses existed in isolation there is now an attempt to ensure that progression pathways are available.

> *A progression studies course is offered in one FE college. Within this, individuals work with support to review their past experiences and achievements and to examine options for the future. Students build action plans based on: education, training and employment; the community and living skills; and independence. They go on to identify clear targets in each area and identify what needs to be done in order to achieve these targets. These plans are given timescales and by the end of the course the students will have produced a progression studies booklet.*

Many FE colleges have valued the opportunity to examine progression routes for individuals more carefully. For some learners this has meant new opportunities to move through levels of provision and on to accredited vocational courses.

Some FE colleges have clear routes through provision for students with learning difficulties such as the Independent Living Skills course on to a City and Guilds Cookery course and then to NVQ 1 Catering.

Other colleges reported a substantial uptake of NVQ Level 1 by people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the areas of construction, motor vehicle maintenance and hairdressing. More problematic areas for progression are caring where there tends to be a high level of competition and art and design - which is considered too theoretical at Level 1 to be feasible for many people with learning difficulties.

There is a recognition that many adults have been 'in the system' for many years without progression pathways. Many drifted randomly from course to course. They received little or no guidance or assessment, no accreditation or recorded recognition of achievement and were in many cases under challenged by the opportunities offered to them.

Most establishments recognised that progress is different for some learners. At one end of the spectrum there are students whose progress is immeasurably slow. For other students the learning goals are maintaining or regaining skills rather than developing higher level skills. Examples cited were individuals with mental health problems and learners with long term illness. Progression for students with mental health problems may not reflect patterns for other learners; students may regress at times and may need to repeat sections of their learning. This does not fit easily with a funding mechanism which rewards progressive achievement. Learners with mental health problems are by the nature of their disability unlikely to show steady progression.

Provision for learners with mental health problems is delivered by one college through a flexibly delivered ten-week programme which comprises five two-week modules. Adapted enrolment procedures, transport and timing combine to offer a student-based mode of delivery.

Similarly, older learners and those with degenerative conditions may be helped to maintain independence, living skills and confidence by using learning opportunities to sustain skills levels.

There was a widely reported reduction in the number of older learners accessing provision; traditionally these learners attended leisure type courses within adult education provision and nearly all providers reported that there are fewer options available now. Within FE, the mismatch between the requirements of Schedule 2 and the FEFCs' funding methodologies, and the learning needs of older learners, was evident. Progression — as defined in Schedule 2 — is not likely to be a reality for this group and though individuals may be maintaining skill levels, this does not attract FEFC funding.

Despite these difficulties, over all, the new focus on transition and progression has resulted in curricular change in all establishments. Progression-linked courses have been developed in all areas, particularly in basic skills where clearer levels or stages of learning have been developed by several institutions. The focus on progression and achievement was welcomed by the majority of establishments.

Recommendations

All agencies:

- be clear about the key aim of developing and maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum which encompasses the learning needs of all learners
- define their roles and identify their particular contribution to meeting the needs of the learners in the locality, in order to achieve the key aim most effectively
- require strategic and operational plans to develop and maintain an appropriate curriculum

- contribute to multi-agency planning groups to ensure collaborative approaches and co-ordination across various curriculum providers to avoid unnecessary duplication or gaps

LEAs:

- work closely with local colleges, and other providers, to plan and ensure that progression routes are available
- ensure that all staff have access to development opportunities to enable them to meet the needs of learners when planning and developing the curriculum

Colleges:

- provide a wide range of access and progression points for learners, to reflect their diverse and changing needs
- develop curriculum opportunities at both Foundation and pre-Foundation level
- review discrete provision, consider its role, and ensure that planned progression opportunities are available
- develop and maintain a wide range of strategies for delivering individual support for learners
- explore the use of volunteer schemes or co-student support schemes to facilitate access to mainstream programmes and college life in general for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities
- ensure that all learners have individual learning plans with clearly specified targets
- offer externally recognised accreditation which enhances progression opportunities and provides evidence of achievement

- ensure that accreditation offered to individual learners matches their needs and enhances their learning

Chapter 6

Support systems

Better support systems for students at all stages of their learning were welcomed. The FEFCs' funding methodologies were acknowledged as very positive in promoting this area of work. Improved pre-entry guidance and diagnostic assessment processes have ensured that learners are advised on appropriate learning programmes and are clearer about their learning pathways and the intended outcomes. A central feature of the support systems from pre entry to exit was the role of learning support co-ordinators, who have responsibility at entry for identification and provision of support for students.

Pre entry

Most establishments reported formal links with other agencies through committees and inter-agency planning teams. These provide a forum for the identification of levels of need, planning to meet the needs identified and the negotiation of roles and responsibilities in making provision. However, at an operational level, these structures were not always effective and necessary information about individuals was not always

passed on. *Managing Transition* (FEU, Nov. 1994) offers a framework for effective multi-agency transition.

The FEFC funding methodology recognises the importance of guidance and advice and has led a number of FE colleges to develop central admissions systems. Where these had clear procedures for referral for additional support, there were increased opportunities for the early identification of particular requirements.

There was concern that sometimes complex diagnostic assessment procedures were undertaken; however, unless the person subsequently enrolled at that establishment, the costs could not be claimed. Where someone applied to several establishments, this process was duplicated and resources wasted. It was proposed that establishments should be able to claim for assessments, regardless of subsequent enrolment, as long as the outcomes were made available to other agencies, with the permission of the learner. The danger in not fully funding all diagnostic assessments is that some establishments will be tempted to delay until the student is enrolled and on programme, which may lead to inappropriate provision or a failure to provide appropriate support from the start.

On entry

A range of approaches to identifying and assessing needs was evident. There was growing use of the application form providing an opportunity for 'self declaration', followed by diagnostic interviews to assess exact requirements. Many FE colleges were developing screening or initial assessment practices, administered across the college, to assess basic skills. Some offered a series of 'taster' programmes which fulfil the dual function of enabling students to make informed choices and offering staff a means of assessing capability in a realistic context.

One college developed an initial assessment procedure working in collaboration with an educational psychologist who trained the staff in assessment techniques.

Another establishment developed a comprehensive six-week induction, screening and initial assessment programme.

On programme

A range of approaches was used to support both individual learners and staff working with them. Establishments have increasingly developed learning support teams of tutors and learning support assistants who provide individual support in mainstream classes. The impact of this has been growing awareness amongst mainstream staff of the additional needs of learners and a sharing of responsibility with learning support staff. Strong support for a whole-college approach was recommended. It has the advantage of giving responsibility to tutors and admissions staff for all learners, with learning support staff t fulfilling a complementary role in identifying and meeting support needs.

Exit

There was growing awareness of the need to identify and plan progression routes both through and beyond education. Lack of realistic alternatives for many learners was identified, e.g. progression to work despite severely restricted opportunities in the current economic climate. Shortage of sheltered and supported employment schemes is also a problem. Where students successfully completed their learning programmes but there were no opportunities for employment should they progress to 'unemployment'? or should an extended education programme be devised?

One college has been looking at 'recurrent' learners, i.e. those who had been using the provision for several years. By identifying other types of provision and support (not necessarily educational), staff have been able to move some learners on and create space for others who will benefit from educational provision.

Recommendations:

FEFC:

- review the funding methodology to allow organisations to claim the costs of initial diagnostic assessments, whether or not the learner subsequently enrols
- reconsider the funding methodology to allow organisations to claim specialist equipment costs on additional support needs forms

All agencies:

- ensure that learners have access to appropriate assessment and support systems
- collaborate to ensure the smooth transfer of relevant information and advice in order to support learners

Colleges:

- staff at both strategic planning and operational levels need to be pro-active in liaising with other agencies
- ensure early identification of particular requirements, clear procedures need to be in place for referral for additional support requirements
- develop whole-college approaches to supporting individual learners
- identify and plan progression routes both through and beyond education, ensuring that support is available at all stages

Chapter 7

The impact on learners

The changing pattern of learners

A clear majority of adult and community education providers of LEA-funded non- Schedule 2 provision, reported a priority shift away from work with people with severe learning difficulties. Classes have been cut as resources have been reduced and strategic decisions have been made to make the most efficient use of diminishing resources. Classes where support needs are high, or those requiring double staffing, are no longer seen as justifiable. An increase in Schedule 2 provision, and the loss of particular posts designated to support those with learning difficulties and disabilities, were cited as reasons for the reduction in provision. Those with greater support needs were identified as vulnerable in the context of these changes. Simple comparisons of student numbers over the last three years masks the underlying trend. Although overall numbers of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities may appear to be similar and provision may appear roughly stable, there are significant changes to the support requirements of those who continue to attend. Those who are able to learn with less support are prioritised while those with high support needs are no longer receiving education.

One adult and community education service no longer caters for students with severe disabilities. This is due to a range of factors, primarily an overall reduction in resourcing. In order to offer some provision to as many students as possible, support staff, team teaching opportunities and one-to-one support have all been discontinued. Opportunities for these learners have been further diminished by the lack of curriculum breadth in the general mainstream offer. A thriving adult education integration programme has virtually disappeared.

Few providers now meet a wider range of needs than in past years but there were a number of interesting developments noted.

Learners who were described as having challenging behaviour were targeted for extra support by one FE college and there were few instances of unacceptable or difficult behaviour from these learners while at college. Where learners valued their college experience and expectations were high, their responses were accordingly good. In addition, staff teams had developed confidence in working with these individuals and understood their requirements.

Educational provision was being developed for learners from a drug dependency unit who attend a secure unit. This was designed to complement the medical, social and therapeutic programmes developed by the other agencies involved.

Unmet needs

All the establishments in our sample were aware of some learners whose needs they were not meeting. Where establishments kept waiting lists, these also demonstrated unmet need. In projections based on local demographic statistics, the percentage of people with learning difficulties and disabilities in the local areas was not reflected in the percentage of students enrolled.

Who wins and who loses?

Winners

There are a number of effects of the requirements of the FEFC funding methodology which have led to overall benefits for all learners with learning difficulties and disabilities:

- All FE colleges are required to identify within their strategic plans how they intend to make provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- As a requirement of funding, FE colleges must maintain the numbers of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and increase their numbers in line with their planned targets for growth.
- The funding methodology recognises the importance of guidance which has led colleges to improve their services for all applicants and increased the chances that students will enrol on appropriate courses, at the right level, in order to meet their long term aims.
- In order to attract funding for additional support needs, providers have improved their systems for the identification and assessment of needs. Screening and diagnostic assessment procedures have been developed in response. This has been of particular benefit to learners who require support with their basic skills, especially those who may not previously have been identified at the outset.
- The provision of defined resources for additional support has encouraged senior managers to address issues of entitlement for all learners. For the first time disability issues are clearly on the agenda and there has been an apparent move 'away from the ghetto.' People with learning difficulties and

disabilities are valued as learners and this is demonstrated through the provision of resources to meet their requirements.

- Clearer progression routes which give access to the whole college curriculum are in evidence. This has particularly benefited learners who were insufficiently challenged. In mapping progression routes internally, some establishments have identified gaps in provision particularly at foundation and pre foundation level. In filling these gaps the breadth of curriculum has been widened and the opportunity to succeed enhanced for many learners.
- The focus on accreditation and the move from 'college certificates', to externally recognised forms of accreditation has enabled some learners with learning difficulties and disabilities to have their achievement recorded and recognised in the same way as other learners. The processes involved in external accreditation have imposed a new sense of rigour, accountability and quality on provision for these learners, which has in turn enhanced the status and value of both learners and tutors.

In summary, the main beneficiaries of recent changes have been learners with mild levels of learning difficulty, and those who require low levels of additional support or assistance with basic skills, to enable them to gain access to and succeed within the general college curriculum offer. Some learners with physical disabilities or sensory impairments have also benefited, when the cost of their necessary support falls with the bands and does not exceed the upper limit.

Losers

In contrast, a consistent picture has emerged of those who have lost their provision or are most likely to lose access to education. Adults with profound and multiple disabilities who are highly dependent, people experiencing mental ill health, elders and those with complex, high cost

support requirements arising from physical or sensory impairments are all identified as having lost out.

Recommendations:

FEFC:

- monitor patterns of unmet need on a regional basis

All agencies:

- monitor the impact of contracting resources on groups of learners
- undertake community profiling activities to establish the nature and extent of unmet need
- record evidence of unmet need to inform strategic planning
- monitor shifting patterns of attendance to highlight the changes for particular groups of learners
- monitor the allocation of additional support to ensure that all learners' requirements are met
- ensure that learners who require high levels of support are not being excluded

Chapter 8
Conclusion

The overall picture of provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities is patchy, with pockets of provision funded by different agencies, available to different groups of learners. The single most important factor in determining whether or not an individual has access to education and the form it may take, is where he or she lives. There is a long way to go to achieve the ideal of open access to a wide range of educational provision, for all who wish to participate.

There have been significant benefits for some learners arising from the impact of the FEFCs funding methodology and the improved quality of Schedule 2 provision, but this is balanced by the trend towards diminishing LEA resources and a number of learners for whom provision is no longer made.

The impact of the split in funding for education between the FEFCs and LEAs has been detrimental to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, since coherent educational programmes will often require both forms of provision. There is a strong perception amongst providers that non-Schedule 2 provision has less value.

The challenge to LEAs and the FEFCs is to ensure that their legal responsibilities for adequate and sufficient provision are met in respect of all learners. FE colleges and adult education providers have to establish their distinct contributions in order to ensure that educational provision is accessible to all who wish to participate, irrespective of the nature and level of their support requirements. Coherent planning is needed at both local and regional level, involving all agencies, in order to deliver effective provision which makes efficient use of available resources, in an equitable way.

Appendix 1

Further and Higher Education Act 1992: Schedule 2

Courses of Further Education

The description of courses of further education referred to in section 3(1) of this Act are the following:

a) a course which prepares students to obtain a vocational qualification which is, or falls within a class, for the time being approved for the purposes of this subparagraph by the secretary of state

b) a course which prepares students to qualify for:

i) the General Certificate of Secondary Education

ii) the General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level or Advanced Supplementary Level (including Special Papers)

c) a course for the time being approved for the purposes of this subparagraph by the secretary of state which prepares students for entry to a course of higher education

d) a course which prepares students for entry to another course falling within paragraphs (a) to (c) above

e) a course for basic literacy in English

f) a course to improve the knowledge of English those for whom English is not the language spoken at home

g) a course to teach the basic principles of mathematics

h) in relation to Wales, a course for proficiency or literacy in Welsh

j) a course to teach independent living and communication skills to persons having learning difficulties which prepares them for entry to another course falling within paragraphs (d) to (h) above

Appendix 2
References

Further and Higher Education Act (1992) Chapter 13, s.11 (9)

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